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SUBJECT: MOROCCAN REACTIONS TO THE POTUS MIDDLE EAST TRIP

Classified by Polcouns Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Coverage in the Moroccan media of President Bush's trip to the Middle East was almost entirely, even studiously, factual and based largely on wire service articles. One opinion column in a mass market Arabic daily was stinging critical. A January 14 visit to Morocco by King Abdullah of Jordan yielded a public condemnation of Israeli "violations against the Palestinian people" but no mention by the two monarchs of the President's trip. A key parliamentary leader told us he welcomed the President's initiative but asserted that Israeli military operations against militants in Gaza would undermine U.S. efforts to restart the peace process. MFA sources regarded the trip as important step, but were either not optimistic or reticent about the outcome. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Coverage in the Moroccan media of President Bush's trip to the Middle East was almost entirely, even studiously, factual and based largely on wire service articles. Of the very few opinion pieces generated by the trip, a January 16 column which appeared in the mass market Arabic daily Al-Massae was typically cynical. The piece claimed that the President's main theme was to "threaten Iran and incite its Arab neighbors against it," while "advocating Israel's security and finding solutions to its colonial schemes."

¶3. (SBU) Although King Abdullah of Jordan's January 14 arrival in Morocco for a state visit coincided with the end of President Bush's visit to the Middle East, neither King made reference to it in public remarks. Maghreb Arab Press, the state news agency reported on January 15 that the two monarchs "condemned the continuous violations perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people and called on the international community to end such practices, which do not serve stability, security, and peace in the region." A text of their communique, released in Jordan, spoke vaguely of the Annapolis process.

¶4. (C) Hamid Narjis, a Vice President of the Chamber of Deputies and caucus leader for the key "Tradition and Modernity" parliamentary bloc, told us on the margins of a January 18 meeting that President Bush's visit to the region had been a welcome effort to try to restart the dormant Israeli-Palestinian peace process. He lamented, however, that the coincidence of the President's visit with Israeli military operations against militants in Gaza had generated significant negative coverage across the Arab world and would undermine U.S. efforts to advance peace.

¶5. (SBU) Subsequent to the visit, there have been small, but growing public protests about the situation in Gaza. Some of these have been directed at the UN offices, none at USG facilities. We understand a national day of protest has been called for January 27.

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